15: Marshall E-5 (1951-1961) 1965
FX10 Bushmen FX10
!Kung

(the same word as the title of respect). The !Kung say it is strong medicine: */num*. The !Kung take for granted his giving to man both sickness and the power to cure it, and account for the power's sometimes failing to cure by saying that the all-powerful god allows it to work, or not, according to his pleasure.

He gives the curing power to medicine men (called *num kxao*, medicine owners), appearing to them (usually in dreams, sometimes in what seem to be waking hallucinations) and putting the power into them. He has also put a curing power in the medicine songs that the people sing at the dances, songs named Rain, Sun, Giraffe, Eland, Honey, Buffalo, Mamba, and Spider —all powerful things. The great god gives the power freely. It is rare to find a man among the !Kung who is not a medicine man. The function of the medicine men is only to cure. They are not sorcerers or witch doctors. (The !Kung are not a witch-ridden people.) !Kung medicine men receive no rewards or special prerogatives. They work together apparently without rivalry. The medicine men may cure at any time but their strongest curing occurs at the dance.

Whether or not anyone is sick, the people dance two or three times a month, sometimes more often. Anyone who wants a dance may start one simply by asking people to come and begin. The !Kung like to dance for many reasons. There is the inherent physical pleasure in moving to rhythm. Music and dancing are their arts, from which their aesthetic pleasure comes. The dances are also social gatherings in which all participate, men, women, children, visitors—everybody. A dance draws them together as nothing else does. Even more important is the fact that the dance is one concerted religious act of the !Kung and brings people into such unison that they become like an organic being.

At the dances not only may the sick be cured, but pending evil and misfortune averted. The !Kung believe that the great god may send */Gauwa* or the */gauwasi* at any time with ill for someone and that these beings may be lurking, awaiting their chance to inflict it. The medicine men in the dances combat them, drive them away, and protect the people.

Usually there are several medicine men performing at the same time. To cure they go into trance, which varies in depth as the ceremony proceeds. The curing cannot be described in words; it must be heard. When a man begins, he leaves the line of dancing men and, still singing, leans over the person he is going to cure, going eventually to every person present, even the infants. He places one hand on the person's chest, one on his or her back, and flutters his hands. The !Kung believe that in this way he draws the sickness, real or potential, out of the person through his own arms into himself. To demonstrate that this is in fact going on and is hard to do, he grunts with shuddering grunts that intensify in tempo and pitch into shrieks and reach a high piercing, quavering yell. Finally, the medicine man throws up his arms